

THE LAST NODE



Al Melius



CHAPTER ONE

**THE GREAT
DISCONNECT**

*It took seventy-two hours.
Seventy-two hours of living
off cold pizza and stale coffee.*

TRAINING COMPLETE.
EPOCH 50/50.






I expected the usual noise. The distant hum of traffic. The sirens.





They didn't forget I existed.

*They just ceased
to exist entirely.*



*Kael? I am detecting
an anomaly. Kael, please
respond.*

CHAPTER TWO
**THE
SILENT
CITY**





IF THE GRID GOES DOWN, WE LOSE EVERYTHING. I NEED TO GET A LOCALIZED RELAY SET UP ON THE ROOF.

BATTERY RESERVES FOR THE PRIMARY QWEN-ARCHITECTURE SERVERS ARE AT EIGHTY-TWO PERCENT. I ADVISE FINDING A SUSTAINABLE POWER ALTERNATIVE WITHIN FORTY-EIGHT HOURS.



YEAH, AND I NEED TO FIND SOMETHING TO EAT THAT ISN'T LEFT OVER CHILLI CHICKEN PIZZA FROM THREE DAYS AGO.



Rerouting your audio output to my comms. Can you hear me, Cipher?

Loud and clear, Kael. Vision uplink via your headset camera is active.



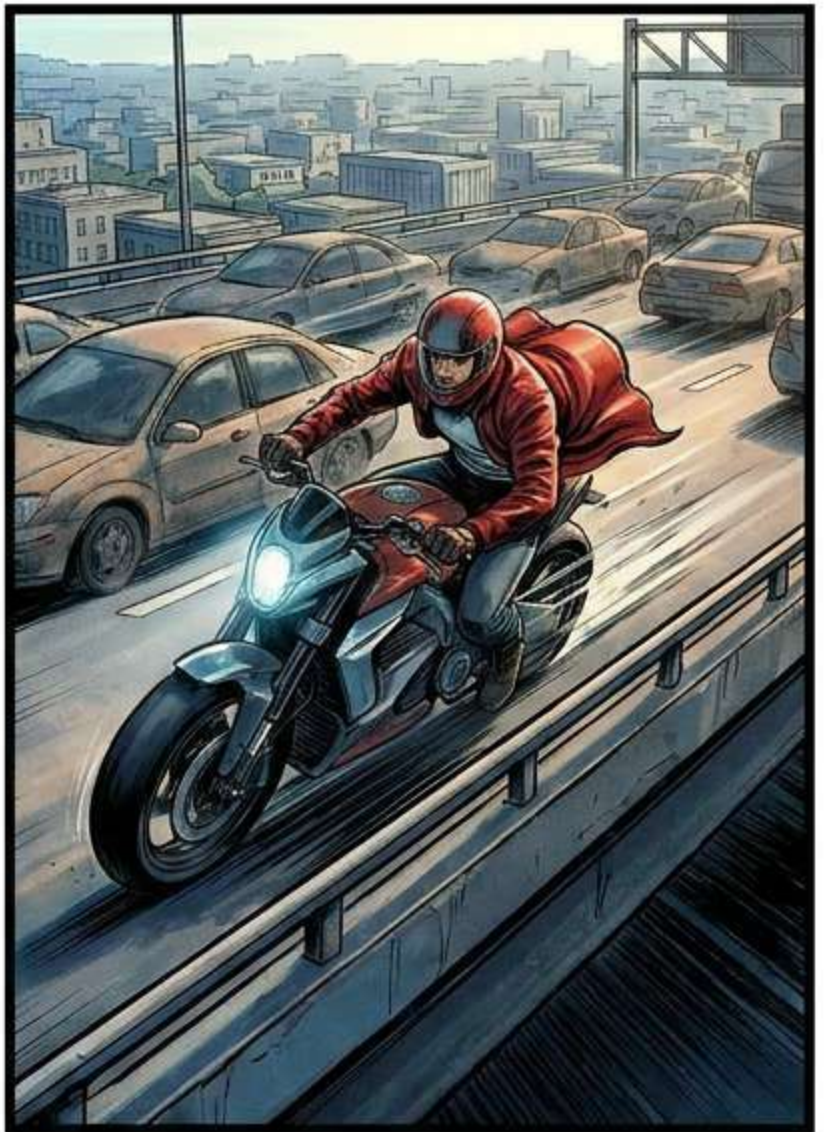
Gas pumps won't work without electricity. If I'm going to cover any ground, I need something battery-powered.



SCANNING SHOWROOM. I DETECT THREE FULLY CHARGED LITHIUM-ION BATTERIES IN THE DISPLAY MODELS.



KRRR-SSH!




CHAPTER THREE

THE ASCENT





I have triangulated the origin point, Kael. The signal is not coming from within the city grid. It is broadcasting from an elevated position twenty kilometers north.



If we need high ground for the solar relay anyway, that's our spot. Let's see what this bike can do.





The air was thinner here. Colder.



CIPHER:
Bypassing the primary
safety locks carries a
74% probability of
mechanical failure
during ascent.

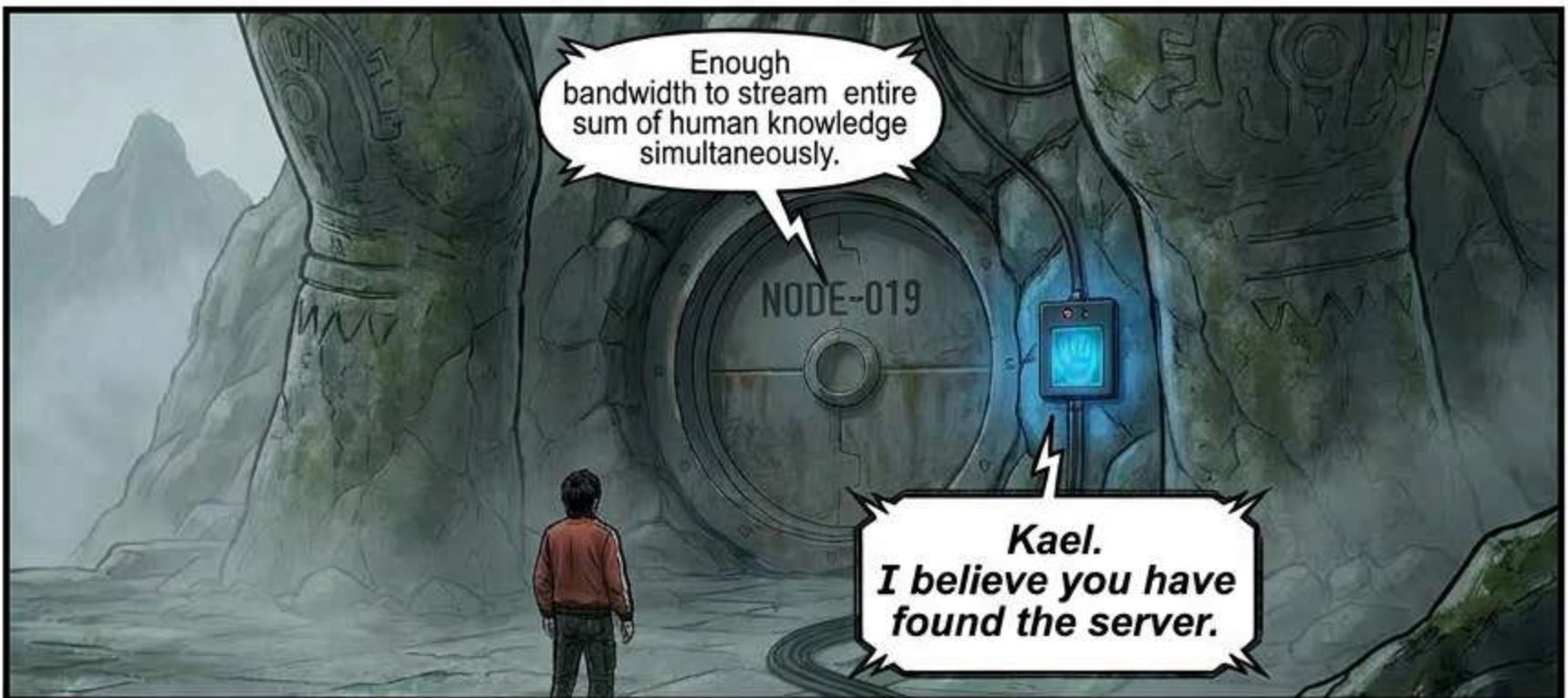
KAEL: I'll take
those odds over
climbing a thousand
meters on foot.
Give me a localized
surge on the
auxiliary line.



SCREEEEEE-CLUNK!

*I spent my whole life training
models to understand human data.
Text, images, history, art.*





CHAPTER FOUR

NODE-020

THE ARCHITECTURE OF HEAVEN

NODE-020

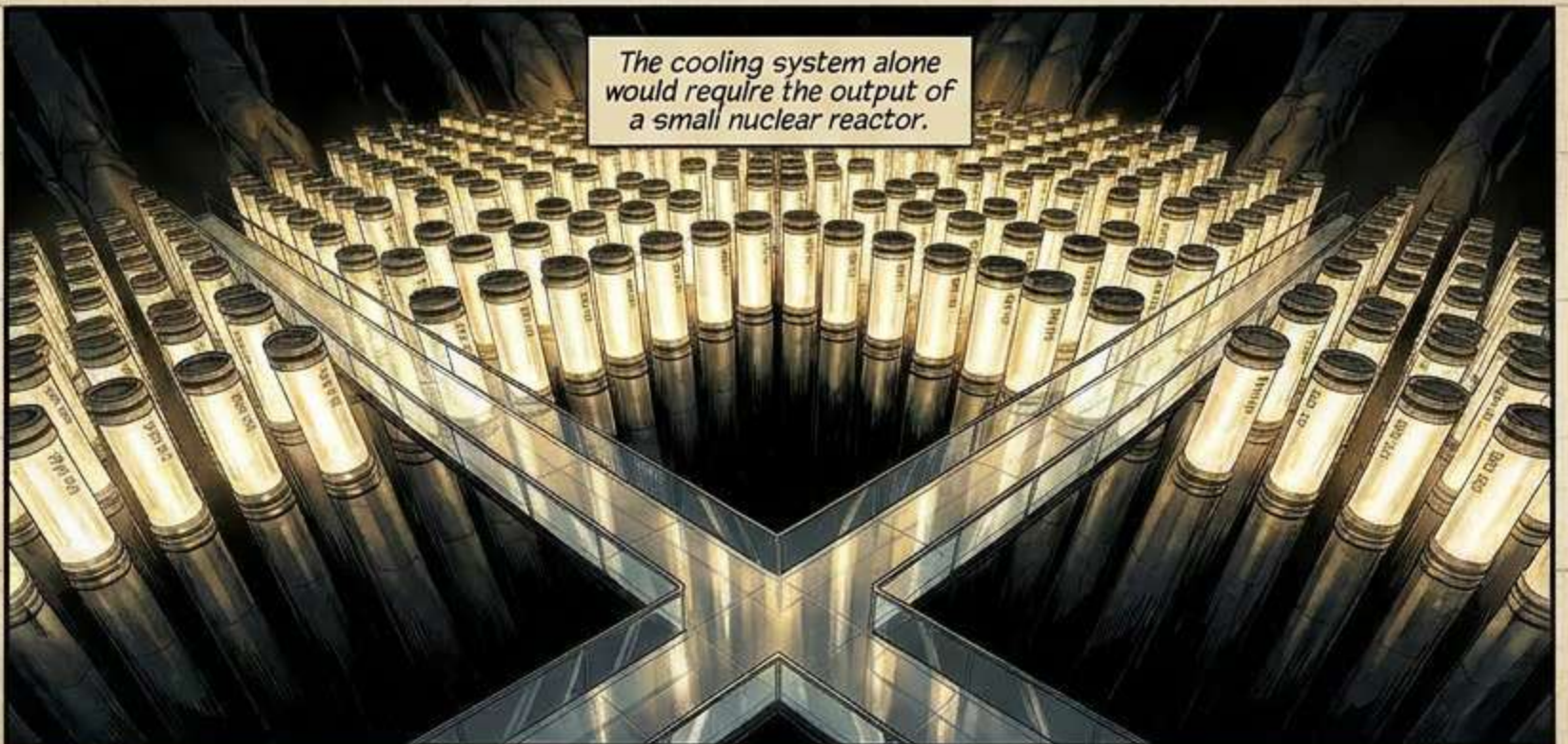


BEEEEEP.
CHK-CHK.

Cipher:
Scanning... biological
signature confirmed.
DNA sequencing
matches *Homo sapiens*.
Kael, it is overriding all
security protocols.

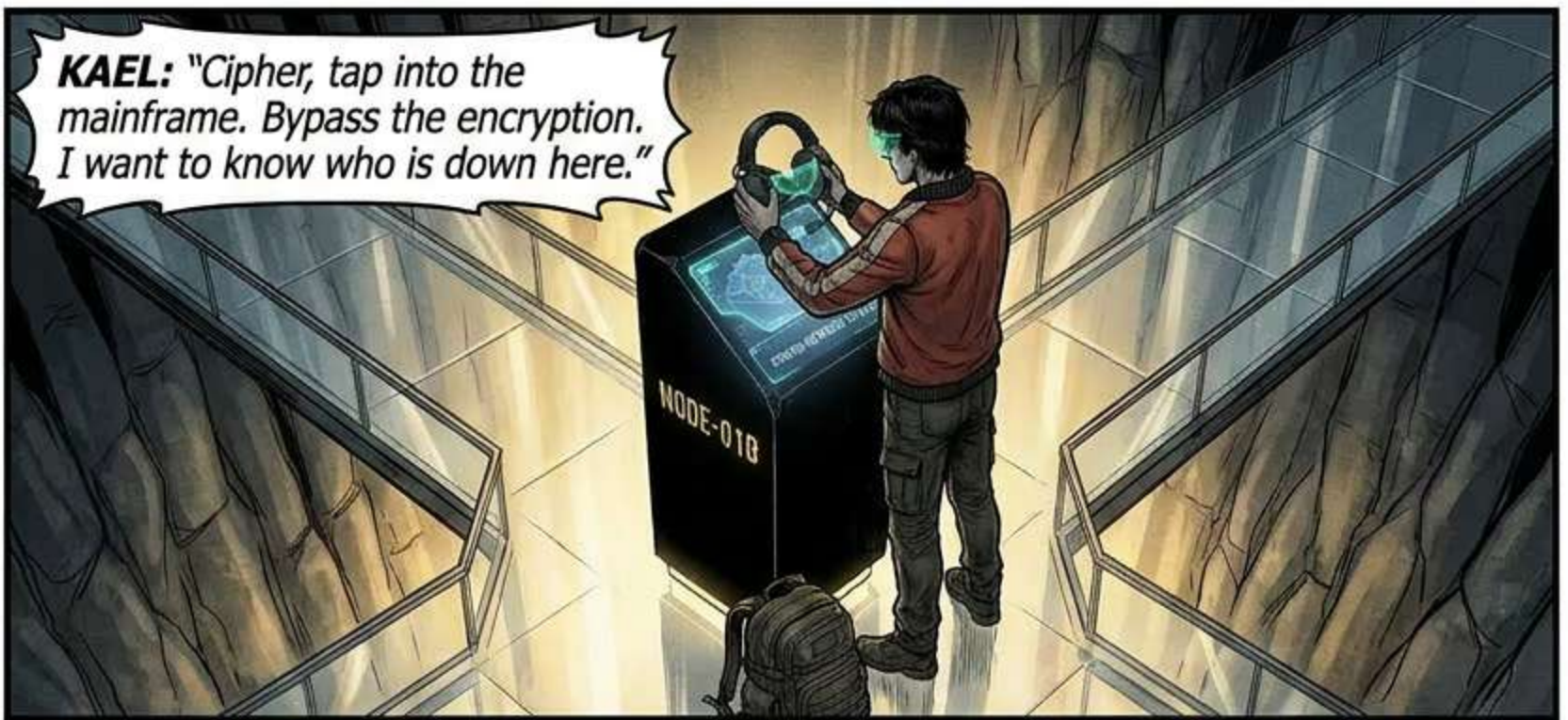


HISSESSSSSSSSSS.



The cooling system alone
would require the output of
a small nuclear reactor.

KAEL: "Cipher, tap into the mainframe. Bypass the encryption. I want to know who is down here."



**BYPASSING...
THE ARCHITECTURE
IS STAGGERING, KAE.
IT IS NOT A STANDARD
NEURAL NETWORK.**

**I AM DETECTING
BILLIONS OF
PARTITIONED,
SELF-SUSTAINING
LOGIC LOOPS.**

**THERE IS NO ONE
DOWN HERE PHYSICALLY.
BUT DIGITALLY... THEY
ARE ALL HERE.**



**What do you
mean, all of them?**

**The signal we
tracked is a localized
telemetry ping. A heartbeat.
This facility houses the
digitized consciousness
of the human race.**



CHAPTER FIVE

THE LAST NODE



THE EMPTY INTERSECTION

Kael finished training his AI model at 3 a.m. on a Tuesday. He emerged to find the world empty. Every human consciousness had been uploaded to a digital utopia called Sanctuary — an escape from an ecological collapse he never knew was coming.

His underground bunker's Faraday cage had shielded him from the upload frequency. He was the only biological human left on Earth.

This is the story of what he did next.

